

Wisconsin Bear Advisory Committee Meeting

Friday, November 30th, 2018

9:00 – 3:00

Meeting convened at 9:03

Agenda additions:

Dave Ruid – Translocated bears
Bear hunter survey
Hound hunting – pros + cons – in Central forest zone

Public input (3 minutes per public attendee)

- Recommendation to expand the hound hunting area – bow hunters would be very upset if this stays the same. – 7 minutes
 - Not as many bears in zone C – allowing hounds in the Southern zone would cause a great decreasing impact in few years
 - Increase in wolves – 19 to 20 wolves seen
 - Don't open southern zone
 - Permit waiting times in zone C – 2 years – allow dogs – time goes up – reduced license sales – don't want to wait 10 years for permit – take away hunting opportunities
 - People who apply for zone C want to avoid conflicts with hound hunters
- Farmer wanted DNR to set up the field, but no one would stop and make the assessment of damage – he thinks the DNR didn't want to see it – wants a committee member to look at the damage
 - These kinds of problems will be addressed by the board meeting in January

Quota setting for 2019 Bear Season

Nathan Roberts Presentation:

- Summary of 2018 season
 - Quota for 2018 = 4,550 – 3,316 harvested = -18%
 - Not much change in harvest regionally over time
 - Graph of harvest peaked in 10 and we are down a little from the early 2000's
 - WI still takes more bears annually than any other states
 - Graph includes tribal harvest – graph off by one bear from Bayfield county
 - Graph also includes damage and nuisance
 - Number of permits issued – continue to increase permits – less success = more permits – still a long wait
 - Success rates have bounced around a bit and now decreasing in zone C
 - When we calculated permits – it is estimated off of the last 3 years of data
 - Average Female age of bears overall is slightly increasing overtime – but it is a small difference
 - Average Male age is very slightly decreasing over time
 - Our bears have more of an opportunity to grow older in areas due to selectivity = lower harvest mortality in those areas (zone A)

- Opportunity to get a trophy bear has been consistent over the years – slightly decreasing in Zone C
- In WI you can not take a cub
 - Average bear is 3.5 – 9.5 years old
 - Northern zone has been consistent while southern zone has been younger bears
- Zone Quota assessment
 - Zone D – **KEEP THE QUOTA THE SAME – 1,300 = 2,440 PERMITS 2018**
 - Goal has been to slightly reduce population – alleviate problems
 - Using age-to-harvest model – match up well with B, C and D
 - Confidence intervals to be transparent about not being able to know the exact number or what the projection ahead will be
 - The more we know and apply to the graph – we can better project outcomes
 - Assuming that age structure is the same as 2 years back since the previous year's data has a lag
 - 90% of bears harvested we get the teeth for estimating age structure
 - Uncertainty increases the farther out the you project the estimate
 - Decreasing 20% on graph means degreasing the quota – this could cause population to grow – even if the quota stayed the same – population would still grow
 - If 1,550 was set – population wouldn't change – Increase quota?
 - 1,550 is not the number of permits issued
 - **Member Recommendation** – having a 1,550, increase of 250 from last year, would be a reasonable quota
 - **Member Comments**
 - Northern folks are concerned about overall size and age of harvested bears - Zone D has the biggest bears
 - Get age structure by DMU
 - Want to pull back a little on permits, so that we don't have a drop in quota by 2020 when zone structure could change – comfortable with keeping the quota the same as last year
 - If the southern Ag problem was taken out what decision would be made?
 - Keep 1300 if everything is going well now
 - Once we change the zone in administrative code – it would take 1.5 years until the change would be applied
 - If we maintain quota – the population would grow a little bit
 - We can still fix the farm problem – not with an increase in quota
 - Some Hunting groups are cutting back themselves because they see the smaller bear trend, another reason to not increase quotas
 - Zone C – **850 quota = 6310 Permits**
 - Estimated population in zone C is only estimated for the areas where we are killing bears
 - If we decrease the quota – population would stabilize
 - Last year quota was 1200 – only ~600 bears killed
 - **Recommendation is to decrease quota** – this doesn't have to be for any amount of time.

- Bears will be managed in each of the subzones of Zone C by the metrics from the last meeting – in Central and Southwest subzones, dumping permits is not what we decided on last meeting
- **Member comments**
 - Need to balance ever increasing permits
 - Set a quota that is more achievable compared to the 1,200
 - Zone C is an opportunity zone – can't have the opportunity if you don't have a permit – we have saturated the area – keep the same permits or less than last year
 - **Recommendation of 850 quota = 6310 Permits**
 - Changing the quota is not dictated by how achievable is may seem
 - If we don't harvest 850 bears the estimated population will increase
 - We don't actually know how many bears are in the overall zone C

Zone B – **785 Quota = 1255 permits**

- **Member Recommendation** – slight decrease in quota (800) to 785 = 1255 permits – would led to stability
- **Member comments**
 - Public will be Okay with the slight decrease since they didn't harvest that many bears
 - Don't want any more bears than maintained
 - Concerns about bear problems have already been addressed through harvest – 750?

Zone A – **900 quota = 1590 Permits**

- We saw discrepancy between models and data
- 2018 Harvest goal was 1,200 and we got 1,179
- Suggestion – decrease the quota –
- 2017 about 2100 permits were issued
- **Member comments**
 - All the locals say 2018 was one of the worst years
 - Lessen the pressure on public land
 - Public is already decreasing efforts to try to counteract the decrease in population that they are seeing in the field
 - Bears are getting smaller – want bears to survive in able to harvest bigger bears over time
 - Can't see dropping permits that far due to already high crop damage
 - Hot spot problem that a zone wide decrease won't change
 - Zone restructuring could mitigate the problem
 - Adjusting the quota zone wide doesn't mean there is going to be a direct reflection in problems up or down for that hot spot.
 - Population in zone C has dropped overtime and it still hasn't changed the hot spot problems
 - Statutory language can't be very influenced by committee recommendations
 - We see just as many bears if not more, but not as big

- Hunters would not support a decrease from a quota of 1200 in 2018 to anything lower than 900.
- Just because we want to kill more bear we need to be concerned about the resource
- If you properly management, the bears for the resource than the wait times are not of concern – only on a personal basis
- Can't put a public recreational activity of a decrease in permits in front of a living of farming.

Statewide quota of 3835 which equals 11,595 permits

Brad Presentation – Ag. Damage – no big trends that suggests us to respond to a change in zone wide quotas

- 43 bears harvested with damage permits for Ag. damage
- Average year for 2018 compared to what we saw last year
- Committee member – amount of Ag. Damage in 2016 = \$200,000 – 2017 = \$100,000 – From early acorn crop – Acorns dropped early again this year – Agrees with figures
- Number of enrollments – 16 fewer in 2018 than 2017
 - Rusk county 8 fewer enrollments – didn't contact within 10 days of initial damage
 - Excluding apiaries – still fewer enrollments – but not much change – 155 in 2017 – 134 in 2018
 - A measure of farmer tolerance
- Huge reduction in appraised damages from 2016 to 2017 – slight increase thought for this year, but not much over the \$100,000
 - Crop price fluctuates - Look at acreages
 - Farmers mostly agree with assessment
- **Member Comments:**
 - Need more frequent drone flights to properly assess damage throughout the season
 - Members complaint that the numbers aren't realistic since the drones only fly a couple times
 - Have all of the damage appraised not just at the \$10,000, but to keep checking so we know the total actual damage
 - Damage program by rule – tell us within 10 days – and as soon as harvest occurs
 - Not appraising damages where hunters are not allowed to hunt – other damage that was not included in the appraisal graph
 - Drones are fairly new – drones or fixed wing, still need man on the ground to do assessment
 - Number of enrollees is going down – farmers getting fed-up with the program – member logged hours and spend over \$3000 in gas and time – not worth the time to enroll
 - Bear program doesn't include deer, geese, elk and turkeys
 - Farmers Can't keep affording to pay for damages out of pocket past the damage limits through the program
 - Pg. 9 of black bear response plan
 - >\$1,000 to get permit
 - Baiting restrictions

- Member wants to see that where damage reaches >\$20,000 baiting should be allowed, if it reached >\$5,000 the previous year they should be eligible the next year to start baiting. Wouldn't start baiting until permit is issued and hunter is onsite – not before
- Concerns with using bait – Pre-baiting, trap tampering, etc.
- ***Committee Recommendation on baiting on shooting permits – Save this topic for later***
- Quotas per zone structure could affect addressing the hot spot damage areas

Dave Ruid – Presentation

- 629 bear complaints in 2018 - 309 bear captured
- 192 bears caught for crop damage
- Nuisance complaints – 36 in Barren Cty – 66 in Polk Cty – 46 Oneida Cty
- Bear Relocated by county – Rusk = 89, 73 for Ag. Damage – Sawyer county damage is way down compared to historically – lack of farmers enrolling in the program (larger you are the more you can absorb – Not sure exactly why there has been such a decrease)
- Only 6 bears killed this year – habituated
- Complaints and bears captures of Ag. and Nuisance – slight decrease
- Sharp decline in bear complains over the last 5 years
- Zone C fairly stable - spike in graph could be dictated by uneducated people estimating age of bear – not significant
- 2018 complaints are the lowest the state has seen in the last 30 years – dictated by quotas set over the last 8 years
- 309 bears caught for all problems – lowest in the last 28 years – quotas are to reduce conflict – has been achieved.

Bob Nack

- Bring bear plan to committee in April
- Draft ready for committee review – January 1st – 2 week comment period
- Present at 3 or 4 public hearings – need to get these planned
- Member Comment:
 - Print and send hardcopy to committee members
 - Scott will send draft – incorporate members comments – committee meeting to talk about changes

Research Needs

- Nathan Roberts – High Priorities
 - 1) **Quantify hunter satisfaction**
 - 2) **How do we increase population estimate confidence?**
 - 3) **How do we assess and mitigate damage?**
 - 4) **Estimating an economic impact of bear hunting**
 - 5) **Chocolate specific effect on bears**
 - 6) **Look at age-structure on private compared to public lands**
- How can we get the most accurate data on population?
 - Genetic mark-recapture – refined

- Having validation for models
- Assumptions of model – reproduction rates, age structure
- Using other metrics
 - Hard to quantify hunter satisfaction – How? = research need
 - Physiological effects on bears from hounds – if we don't want to limit hound hunting, the research need isn't worth it. However, research into population dynamics/bear health may identify concerns related to chasing by hounds, which would suggest follow-up work be done.
 - **Member comments:**
 - Can we calculate annual impacts without doing an annual mark-recapture study? – manipulate population over a 3-year period with the ability to have an annual assessment
 - **State in the plan on how to explicitly reduce depredation rates**
 - Gather info on how wolves affect bears – how baiting affects the conflict between wolves and hounds
 - Why ask the question if we don't know how to research the effects?
 - Try to understand how these metrics affect the population as a broad scale
 - How baiting affects bear effect wolves
 - How can we analyze impacts on baiting on bear health – how would we measure this? – if we took samples from individuals you could assess the health of the population.
 - The last thing we want to do with baiting is have an unhealthy bear
 - We need to be able to more specifically estimate “bear health” to be able to properly estimate population size rather than the statewide average
 - **We don't need to specifically state how hounds or baiting are affecting but rather a broad scale of what influences bear population dynamics**
 - If there is a problem with one of the metrics, assess on how we can manipulate that metric
 - BMP's extend out into the community – a partnership between agencies and the hunters/associations – like the trappers BMP's
 - Pulled together hounds man and provided a workshop to educate about practices and ethics – developing brochure
 - If you don't know how to act, you don't know – BMP's = education
 - List the ecological effects bears have on the landscape

Type of bait allowed: Hunting Methodology

Chocolate: Need more information to make direct recommendation

- We should be proactive in the approach of chocolate
- We could ban chocolate percentages rather than an all or nothing

- Prioritize process – Get funding – High Priority
- **Talk with law enforcement about the feasibility of estimating chocolate percentage restrictions.**
- Public Comments
 - Lots of Milk Chocolate is used
 - Chocolate is mixed in with a lot of other commercial products
 - MI banned chocolate
 - 2 cubs necropsied were thought to have died from Theobromine poisoning
 - Just because we don't see it doesn't mean that it doesn't happen
 - Bait dealers will be greatly affected if we ban chocolate – prices would sky rocket
 - Acceptable to ban solid chocolate product compared to trying to ban a percentage that would be hard to quantify
 - As products come onto the market, we need to assess them.
 - How would we even be able to study theobromine poisoning on bears?
 - If it's so toxic, why can't we see the impacts
 - **Talk with MN about Chocolate use**
 - Buy bait from dealers and test chocolate percentages and use that as a standard

Fish and Fish oil – **Banning whole fish, Allowing fish oil**

- Member Comments
 - Commercializing fish harvest
 - Make a nasty bait site
 - Proposal of not using fish

Tribal Topics

Tribal and non-tribal hunting parties

- Issue when class B went away is that you used to have a class A, but now it is illegal to hunt on a tribal tag.

Tribal declaration process and thresholds

- **If tribal harvest exceeds 15% of the state harvest in that zone there will be a declaration the following year, but they never gotten that close – could include in the plan as information of how we include this in management**
- We are including tribal harvest in our statewide quotas and is used in the projection models

Wait times vs success rates

Member comment:

- **Include an applicant summary in the plan**
- Take our application fee to help fund to offset Ag. Problems – Statutory – can't change this
- Been over 8 years since we have had a license increase

Public vs Private land harvest

Member Comment:

- Are private lands creating a sink?
- Look at age-structure on private compared to public lands

- Private land/ public land bear tags – New Central Forest zone
- **Putting out radio collars for the reproductive study you could also look at where those bears are spending time – public vs private land**

Outreach and Education

Youth Conservation Congress: mention in the plan as a form of outreach

Member Comments:

- If we are going to maintain bears where there aren't bears now needs to be addressed with the public to designate new public tolerance.
- What are we going to do with nuisance bears in these areas where there isn't much public land and how far is too far for relocating.
- Concern about outsourcing education and outreach to 3rd parties and start excluding State Agencies which could arouse misinformation

Further Discussion

BMP's

- **Say that we are establishing BMP's in the plan, but not specifically listing/ outlining those in the plan** – limit scrutiny from the public by showing that we do follow BMP's and that they are established
- Don't want to designate the use of BMP's outside of the committee, but that we provide the information that that resource is available and could be used on how to act
- BMP showing what a lactating sow looks like – not to harvest bears that look like this.
- Commitment in creating BMP's that we recommend following
- Note in plan that this is something we are working to, not specifically listing them

Baiting on shooting permits

- Pros
 - Would be able to get the older bears that aren't going into traps
- Cons
 - Farmers could use this to allow their preference people (relatives) to get a bear and possibly get a bear every year – no wait time.
- Member Comments:
 - As long as there is damage we should be able to bait
 - Historically in Rusk and Sawyer it was up to the local biologist to dictate weather or not they could bait – 2018 banned the baiting
 - **Using scents in order to get bears in, but not provide bait/ food, only while hunting**
 - As long as there is no bait there when you aren't hunting it would be ok – bring in the bait on site when you start hunting – take it away when you leave

Have a survey to assess metrics that dictate new management goals:

- Have the same core questions in a survey for the first 5 years if not every year.
- Almost everyone that gets a survey has mixed methodology

Member input:

- If there is hound hunting in Zone C could be allow bait sitting to begin on Sept. 1st
 - Labor Day weekend
 - Acorn drop changes every year
 - Include as recommendation in draft?
 - **Discuss in January meeting**

Meeting adjourned @ 15:10

Bear Advisory Committee Attendance

Scott Walter – DNR – Chair

Monty Brink – Oconto Co (WCFA)

Greg Kessler – DNR

Miles Falck – GLIFWC

Jed Hopp – DNR

Nathan Roberts – DNR

Michele Woodford – DNR

Brad Koele – DNR

Ralph Fritsch – WWF

Mike Robers – Agriculture

Brian Dhuey – DNR

Michael Rogers – WI. Conservation Congress

Linda Olver – DNR

Dan Eklund – USDA – FS – CNNF

Richard Kirchmeyer – WI Bowhunters Association

Lucas Withrow – HRC

“Illegible Name” – WBHA

Nancy Frost – DNR

John Huff – DNR

Dave Halfmann – DNR NED

Non-Board Attendees

Bob Nack – DNR

Nathan Kluge – DNR

Glenn Stauffer – DNR

Mike Brost – WBHA - Comments